

U.S. EMBASSY – MANILA

American Citizen Services

December 2003

Season's Greetings!

The holidays are a special time for all of us at the U.S. Embassy. A few lucky ones schedule their vacations so they can spend either Thanksgiving or the Christmas Season at home in the United States. I spent my Thanksgiving on my in-laws' turkey farm in Indiana and it reminded me once again how beautiful life is in the Midwest.

While I was home, local TV stations were airing public service messages about the Marine Corps Toys for Tots program and winter coat collections for distribution to needy families. Many of us carry these holiday charity traditions with us abroad. Our ACS office is full this week with bags of goodies provided by the American Women's Club of the Philippines and American Association of the Philippines (AAP) for distribution to the 30 Americans who will spend this holiday in Philippines prisons.

Many of our companies and social and religious organizations also give to the less fortunate during this season and throughout the year. We would like to thank all of our wardens throughout the Philippines who freely give their time and effort to serve the Americans in their communities. Many times this past year our wardens have gone beyond the call of duty to visit a sick American, console bereaved family members following the death of a loved one or provide a warm welcome and sage advice to newcomers. These wardens have also extended their warm hospitality to our staff during 20 outreaches to all corners of the Philippines during the past year. Thanks.

So from all of us at the American Embassy to all Americans in the Philippines, may you have a wonderful holiday season and a safe and prosperous New Year.

Facts on Voting Overseas

- Generally, all U.S. citizens 18 years or older who are residing outside the United States during an election period are eligible to vote absentee in any election for federal office.
- You may apply for an absentee ballot by submitting a Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) to your city, town, county or parish clerk. The FPCA is accepted by all states and territories as either an application for registration form, or for registration or as an application for an absentee ballot.
- Federal Post Card Applications are available without charge from the U.S. Embassy, American Citizen Services Branch, Monday-Friday, 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. ACS can also provide information on voting regulations in your state and the address of voting registrars in your state.
- Although you can not vote or register to vote overseas, Embassy consular officials will assist U.S. citizens in witnessing or notarizing FPCA forms (if required by your state). The Embassy can also serve as a mailing point where FPCA forms and other election materials may be mailed back to your local voting jurisdiction in the U.S.
- Detailed information on absentee voting can be found on the World Wide Web site for the Federal Voting Assistance Program:
<http://www.fvap.gov>.

American Citizen Services U.S. Embassy 1201 Roxas Blvd. Ermita, Manila, Philippines

Office: 63-2-528-6300
x2246/2555

Fax: 632-522-3242

Passport Inquiries: 2-879-4747

Consular Report of
Birth Abroad: 2-879-4747

Website:

<http://philippines.usembassy.gov>

Email:

acsinfomanila@state.gov

American Citizen Services Outreach Schedule

January	Cebu Angeles Olongapo
February	Iloilo Bacolod
March	Laoag Legazpi
April	Angeles Olongapo

Jail In the Philippines

Living and travelling in the Philippines can be a pleasure. It's a country of friendly people and beautiful sights but there is another side to this paradise. Out of the approximately 130,000 American citizens in the Philippines at any one time there are also around 30 Americans who are incarcerated.

The crimes and charges vary but the common trend is 'if it's illegal in the States it's illegal in the Philippines'. Americans are serving time for things that range from estafa (fraud) to drug possession to illegal recruitment of immigrants to pedophilia and overstay of visa combined with some other criminal charge. The sentences also vary but they can be severe and open-ended.

The jails and prisons in the Philippines are also very different from what you may expect. Crowding is the rule, to the point that there is not always enough room to move freely or even have an area to sleep and sit down. In addition meals are small and often private funds are needed to obtain adequate food. Prisoners also complain of things like not being able to attend their court dates, lack of health and dental care, sanitation and safety issues.

Consular officers visit incarcerated American's at least once every three months to monitor their welfare and show local officials that the Embassy is interested in what happens to them. During the initial visit, the officer provides a list of lawyers and asks the American to sign a Privacy Act Waiver that enables the Consular officer to speak to people on behalf of the prisoner. Although the Embassy can not get involved in the legal proceedings of each case, they do monitor its progress, which never seems to be quick or easy.

Exercise Your Right to Vote !!

Absentee Ballot Applications are Now Available Through American Citizen Services

Although the 2004 Presidential Election is 11 months away, many states are already preparing for primary elections. The registration and absentee ballot request deadlines are quickly approaching in states holding Presidential Preference Primaries in January and February 2004. In some states, voters should submit a Federal Post Card Application to their states before the end of 2003 in order to vote in these 2004 elections. The following states are holding Presidential Preference Primaries on:

- District of Columbia: January 13
- New Hampshire: January 27
- Arizona: February 3
- Missouri: February 3 (Submit FPCA not earlier than December 22, 2003)
- Oklahoma: February 3
- South Carolina: February 3
- Tennessee: February 10
- Virginia: February 10
- Wisconsin: February 17

For a complete list of election dates and additional information concerning absentee voting, please visit the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) website at www.fvap.gov or contact American Citizen Services at acsinfomanila@state.gov.

Immigration for Adopted Children

Adopting a child from overseas can be a wonderful and fulfilling experience for many but it can also be a very frustrating and time consuming experience, if you don't do your homework! Adoptive parents must abide by the laws of the local country that govern adoption, as well as U.S. immigration laws, in order to bring an adopted child to the U.S. Simply locating a child in a foreign country and going to the U.S. Embassy to obtain a visa for the child will not meet those requirements. You should contact your local United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) office that has jurisdiction over your place of residence in the United States for information.

❖ Who can be adopted?

Both orphan and non-orphan children can be adopted and live in the United States after meeting specific qualifications determined by U.S. immigration law. However, the child must have been legally adopted before the age of 16 years, or in limited situations, relating to the adoption of siblings (who are under the age of 16), before the age of 18.

❖ What is the definition of orphan?

Under U.S. immigration law, an orphan is a child who does not have parents because of the death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation or loss from, both parents. The term abandonment does not refer to the child being left at a relative's house. It means that the child was legally placed in the custody of a child welfare agency, made a ward of a court or left in the care and custody of another competent authority in the child's home country. An orphan can also be a child with a sole or a surviving parent who is unable to provide for the child's basic needs (consistent with the local standards of the foreign country) and has, in writing, irrevocably released the child for emigration.

❖ How can I adopt an orphan child in the Philippines?

1. Contact: Inter-Country Adoption Board (ICAB)
P.O. Box 1622
#2 Chicago cor Ermin Garcia Streets
Barangay Pinagkaisahan, Cubao, Quezon City- PHILIPPINES
Tel: (632) 726-4568
(632) 721-9781
(632) 721-9782
Fax (632) 727-2026
Email: icaba@skyinet.net
- 2) If you have not yet identified a child for adoption, file an **I-600A** (Application for the Advance Processing of an Orphan Petition) with your local USCIS office in the U.S. An I-600A can only be filed in the United States. For the I-600A you will need a home-study by a licensed social worker, fingerprints, proof of marriage (if you are married); proof of

termination of any prior marriages if necessary, and proof of U.S. citizenship.

If you have identified a child, you can file the **I-600 Petition** (Petition to Classify an Orphan as Immediate Relative) with your local BCIS in the United States. You will need an I-600A approval notice, proof that the prospective adoptive child is an orphan and the adoption decree or legal custody order issued by a foreign court. In order to file your I-600 in Manila, you will need either proof of your permanent resident status in the Philippines or an I-600A approval.

❖ **How do I adopt a non-orphan child?**

In order to adopt and immigrate a non-orphan child, you must have physical and legal custody of the child for two years. This requirement can only be met outside of the U.S. and may take place before or after the adoption is finalized. Physical custody means that the child has lived with you in your household (not the household of a relative) and that you exercised primary parental control. In order to prove primary parental control, the biological parents can not live in the household with you and the adoptive child. Legal custody begins when it has been awarded to the prospective adoptive parent(s) through a legal process via the courts or another recognized government entity.

❖ **Can't I just bring my adopted child back on a tourist visa?**

No. Adopted children are considered intending immigrants and therefore do not qualify for tourist visas. U.S. immigration law has created a process in which adopted children can legally immigrate to the U.S.

❖ **How can I get citizenship for my adopted child?**

Your child may acquire U.S. citizenship through the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 if your adopted child meets the following requirements:

1. Have at least one American citizen parent by birth or naturalization
2. Be under 18 years of age
3. Live in the legal and physical custody of the American citizen parent; and
4. Be admitted as an immigrant for lawful permanent residence
5. The adoption must be final

❖ **Where can I get more information?**

www.philippines.usembassy.gov

www.uscis.gov

-Immigration Benefits /Inter-country adoptions

www.travel.state.gov

-Bureau of Consular Affairs, office of Children's Issues

U.S. Embassy in Manila remains one of the largest visa issuing posts

Although the number of visas adjudicated worldwide has decreased in the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. Embassy in Manila continues to be one of the largest U.S. visa-issuing Consulates.

Preliminary figures for Fiscal Year 2003 (October 1, 2002 to September 30, 2003) indicate that Embassy Manila remains 2nd worldwide for immigrant visa issuance and 8th for non-immigrant or temporary visas. In FY2002, Embassy Manila issued a total of 31,404 immigrant visas and 159,170 non-immigrant visas or 8.1% and 2.8% respectively of worldwide issuance.

“Behind these numbers are the millions of Americans and Filipinos nurturing the closest human ties that are the true strength of the relationship between our countries,” explains U.S. Ambassador Francis Ricciardone.

“Consular services are a critical mission of our Embassy. Our consular officers directly advance our Mission to revitalize the U.S.-Philippine partnership and carry it to maturity by strengthening our mutual security; building mutual prosperity, and serving the American and Filipino public with excellence.”

According to Ambassador Ricciardone it is estimated that there are over two million Filipino-Americans and Filipino permanent residents in the U.S. There are also an estimated 130,000 American citizens residing in the Philippines. “By any yardstick, these are two large groups and these will sustain a huge demand for U.S. consular services in the Philippines.”

“Our goal is to maintain secure borders while keeping our doors open to legitimate travelers,” the Ambassador adds.

New Application Process for Non-Immigrant Visa

An important change in the way non-immigrant visa applications are handled will soon go into effect. The U.S. Department of State now offers an Electronic Visa Application Form (EVAF). You can find the form and instructions on the Internet at <http://evisaforms.state.gov>. Applicants should complete the DS-156 visa application online, print the form and a barcode page, and bring these papers to the Embassy for the interview.

EVAF will allow us to offer better service to visa applicants by making the process quicker and easier for everyone involved. In addition, calls to our call center will be shorter as there is less information required by the customer service representative. With an EVAF, all the call center will need is: name, date of birth, telephone number, passport number, date of issuance and expiration of your passport.

There's nothing stopping any of your friends from trying this out now -- it's the wave of the future!

Off the Line and into the Field!

On October 22, 2003, the Non-Immigrant Visa (NIV) Unit went on an outreach in order to help adjudicate their visa applicants. It is important to understand the conditions and circumstances under which visa applicants work, and to experience more of the Philippines outside the Embassy walls.

The NIV Unit, including all of the Filipino employees, split into four groups in order to maximize effectiveness. They visited a variety of businesses in Pampanga, Bulacan, and Metro Manila. These ranged from a piggery with 4,500 pigs to the Captain Oca training vessel where seafarers prepare for their voyage.

Give the Gift of Life!

You don't have to shop or even wrap the best present you can give to someone this year! The American Association of the Philippines (AAP) provides assistance to American's who are in need. AAP is currently in looking for RH negative blood.

Please contact AAP by phone:

02-892-5198 or

email: aap@surfshop.net.ph

and ask for Shirley.

CAREFUL, CAREFUL---

The "**domicile**" factor

Did you know that family members you have petitioned may not be issued their immigrant visas because you reside in the Philippines?

U.S. immigration law requires that petitioners be "*domiciled*" in the United States or any territory of the U.S at the time of an applicant's visa interview. The law defines "domicile" to mean the principal residence of a petitioner.

An American who has been maintaining residence outside the U.S. will therefore have to present convincing evidence to prove U.S. domicile.

To overcome a domicile concern a combination of the following may be submitted:

- Current bills of local services with the petitioner's name and U.S. address (telephone, cable, internet, electricity, etc)
- Documentation showing employment in the U.S.
- Current school registration for children in U.S. schools
- Documentation showing investments in the U.S.
- Documentation of a current bank account in the U.S.
- Proof that the petitioner participated in recent local, state or federal elections

Read more about the domicile requirement on the U.S. Embassy website at:

<http://philippines.usembassy.gov/www3207.html>

Happy Holidays!

Identity Theft

Identity theft reports are on the rise. An estimated 500,000 people a year become victims of identity theft in the United States. Social security number mis-use accounts for almost 40 percent of all the fraud referrals and 72 percent of criminal convictions for fraud.

Your number can be used to access personal information (i.e. address, employer, employment history, date of birth, mother's maiden name) and even apply for credit in your name.

A stolen number can create difficulties for an individual in that FICA covered earnings may be mis-directed on your Social Security wage record and your credit standing may be damaged.

Avoid becoming a victim by following these simple instructions:

- ❑ Do not carry your social security card in your wallet.
- ❑ Show your social security card to your employer to ensure your earnings are properly recorded,
- ❑ Check your pay stubs to be sure your employer has your correct name and SSN
- ❑ Withhold your SSN when appropriate.
- ❑ Ask questions before disclosing your SSN.
- ❑ Do not use your SSN as your driver's license number or student identification number.
- ❑ Do not have your SSN printed on your checks.
- ❑ Check your SSN earnings record every year for errors. (Emphasize the following key points regarding the *Social Security Statement*: You'll receive a *Social Security Statement* in the mail every year about three months before your birthday; you can use the *Statement* to help plan your financial future and to check your earnings; the *Statement* provides you with estimates of the monthly Social Security retirement, disability and survivors benefits you and your family may be eligible for now and in the future; the *Statement* provides a year-by-year display of your earnings so you can make sure it is accurately reported on your Social Security record)
- ❑ Pay attention to billing cycles. Follow up with creditors if bills do not arrive on time. Remember con artists can change your address with the post office.
- ❑ Keep items with personal information in a safe place; tear them up when you do not need them anymore. Make sure charge receipts, copies of credit applications, insurance forms, blank checks and statements, expired charge cards, and credit offers you get in the mail are disposed of appropriately.

If your identity is stolen contact the fraud department of credit companies (Equifax, EXPERIAN and Trans Union) and security department of creditors or financial institutions with whom accounts were fraudulently opened. File a police report.

Check your Social Security Earnings Record to see if your posted Social Security wages are correct. Social Security can take action to correct your record of earnings. Report to the nearest Social Security office to get a new SSN if yours has been lost or used by someone else.

Attention Veterans!

Are you a recently discharged combat veteran? Did you serve on active duty in a combat theatre such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, other? Do you have a medical condition that you believe is related to your military service? Have you already applied for VA disability compensation benefits?

DID YOU KNOW?

- VA has extended health care benefits to US veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after November 11, 1998.
- Reservists and members of the National Guard who served on active duty in a theater of combat may be eligible for VA health care.
- If you have at least one day of combat service after November 11, 1998, you will be provided priority access to enrollment and VA health care benefits for a two-year period following separation from military service.

DO YOU WISH TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER OR DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE AN URGENT HEALTH CARE PROBLEM TODAY?

- If you meet the criteria for a Combat Veteran and are requesting VA health care, you will be scheduled an initial appointment with a primary care provider, on a priority basis within the context of your clinical needs.
- If you meet the criteria for a Combat Veteran contact Lucy Echaluse, VA Manila's Combat Care Coordinator at VA Manila OPC at 833-4566. If you currently reside outside of the Philippines contact your nearest VA medical facility.

If you wish to file a claim for disability benefits for a medical condition you believe is related to your military service, please contact the Manila VA Regional Office at 1-800-1-888-5252 or visit us at the U.S. Embassy in Manila. If you currently reside outside of the Philippines contact your nearest VA Regional Office.

REGISTRATION FORM

(Date of Registration: _____)

_____ **PERMANENT**

(More than four months)

_____ **TEMPORARY**

(Four months or less)

FULL NAME: (Last,First, Middle)	SEX:
DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH:	SS NUMBER:
COLOR OF EYES:	HEIGHT:
COLOR OF HAIR:	WEIGHT (lbs.):
LOCAL ADDRESS IN PHILIPPINES:	PHONE NO.:
U.S. ADDRESS:	PHONE NO.:
OCCUPATION:	
COMPANY NAME:	PHONE NO.:
COMPANY ADDRESS:	FAX NO.:
E-MAIL ADDRESS:	US PPT. NO.:
EMERGENCY CONTACT:	RELATIONSHIP:
EMERGENCY ADDRESS:	PHONE NO.:
DEPENDENTS' INFORMATION:	
<u>Name</u>	<u>Relationship</u>
<u>Date of Birth.</u>	<u>Passport Number</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Please attach a copy of the biographic page of your passport to this form and return it to: US Embassy, 1201 Roxas Blvd., 1000 Manila, Philippines

YOUR 2 X 2 PHOTO
HERE

PLEASE SIGN HERE:

FOR ACS STAFF ONLY:

() Entered ACS System Date: _____

Public Announcement

THE PHILIPPINES

July 16, 2003

This Public Announcement has been revised to remind travelers of security concerns in the Philippines, particularly on Mindanao. It supersedes the Public Announcement issued March 7, 2003, and expires on January 17, 2004.

The terrorist threat to Americans in the Philippines for kidnapping and bombings remains high and the Embassy continues to receive reports of ongoing activities by known terrorist groups. On July 14, three terrorist suspects with links to Jemaah Islamiyah and other international terrorist organizations escaped Philippines Government custody. In view of a number of security-related incidents and the possibility of future terrorism, kidnappings, and other violence or criminal activity, Americans traveling to or residing in the Philippines are urged to exercise great caution and maintain heightened security awareness. Extremist groups present in Southeast Asia, such as Jemaah Islamiyah, have demonstrated transnational capabilities to carry out attacks against locations where Westerners congregate. Terrorist groups do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Four Americans have died in incidents related to terrorism in the Philippines during the past year.

Terrorist attacks continue in the Philippines, particularly in Mindanao. Since February 2003 bombings have claimed many lives and injured hundreds throughout Mindanao. These incidents included a bombing at the international airport in Davao on March 4, 2003, which killed at least 20 people, including one American, and injured over 140 others. The Government of the Philippines condemned these bombings as acts of terrorism. Other explosive devices have been discovered and defused prior to detonation in these and other areas of Mindanao.

U.S. citizens are urged to defer non-emergency travel to the island of Mindanao due to recurring bombing incidents and threats of other violence and criminal activity, including kidnapping. U.S. citizens should avoid all travel to the islands of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Jolo, located in the Sulu archipelago in the extreme southwest of the Philippines, due to kidnappings and other criminal activity. Americans residing in Mindanao and in the Sulu archipelago should carefully review their security posture, take appropriate action to secure their well-being, and

remain in close contact with the Embassy for current information. As a precaution, the U.S. Government has restricted travel by official personnel to these areas.

A number of bomb-related incidents have also occurred in Metro Manila. The U.S. Embassy urges Americans to avoid crowds and crowded places, including nightclubs and bars, and to exercise special caution in public places, such as shopping malls, or when using public transportation.

The terrorist New People's Army (NPA), the military arm of the Communist Party of the Philippines, operates throughout the Philippines and has issued public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. In January 2002, an American tourist was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman on the slopes of Mt. Pinatubo in Pampanga Province, an area known for NPA activity. Americans are warned to avoid hiking or camping in this area and are advised to exercise caution when traveling elsewhere in the Philippines, due to armed clashes between the New People's Army and government troops in some areas. Extortionists have kidnapped several Filipinos and foreigners, including three American children. Kidnappers operating in Metro Manila and throughout the Philippines have snatched family members of prominent local business leaders and politicians for financial gain, to make a political statement, or as part of business, land, or personal disputes.

The terrorist Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) continues to issue public threats against U.S. citizens and interests in the Philippines. The Abu Sayyaf Group has taken hostage large numbers of Filipinos, Americans and foreign tourists since April 2000. Several were freed after substantial ransoms were paid, some escaped or were rescued by military action, and some were killed. In 2002, one American hostage was killed and another injured during a rescue operation after spending more than a year in captivity. Because Abu Sayyaf has demonstrated its ability to travel long distances by boat to kidnap foreigners, such as the May 2001 kidnapping operation in Palawan, it is possible that other locations in the Philippines, such as beach resorts, could be attacked. Americans should particularly avoid beach resorts in areas where the Abu Sayyaf Group continues to be active.

U.S. citizens living in or visiting the Philippines are encouraged to register with the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy, located at 1201 Roxas Boulevard, Manila; tel. (63-2) 528-6300. For further general information on travel to the Philippines, please consult the Department's latest Consular Information Sheet for the Philippines, and the Worldwide Caution, which are available via the Internet at <http://travel.state.gov>.